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ABSTRACT

This module is designed to serve as part of a special education course in which rural-based problems and issues are addressed. The study guide is in five sections. It begins with a brief introduction to the program. Part 2 is a lecture outline, detailing the sections of the course that address rural special education challenges, life in rural America, and potential solutions to rural special education challenges. Part 3 consists of background information that may be employed as lecture notes. References used in the narrative (lecture notes) as well as recommended reading are provided in Part 4. Part 5 contains masters for overhead transparencies and handouts. (Contains 29 references.) (ND)

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ED 413 300

Delivery of Special Education Services in Rural and Remote Locations: Course Materials

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Delivery of Special Education Services in Rural and Remote Locations

Part I: Introduction

In this module/study guide the following materials are presented: The first section is made up of a lecture outline. A second division consists of background information which may be employed as lecture notes. A third section is made up of references used in the narrative (lecture notes) as well as recommended reading. Overhead transparency masters and handouts are provided in a final section. These may be reproduced by users of the module. A complete reference section.

The module is meant to serve as part of a special education course--particularly one where rural-based problems and issues are addressed. The module was prepared under the auspices of Project ERICA, a grant from OSERS to support training of masters-level learning disabilities and emotional disturbance teachers to serve rural and reservation areas of North Dakota. A second university course work module was prepared under the same granting auspices on the topic of equitable assessment of Native American students and which also covers the general topic of test bias.

Part II: Lecture Outline

I. Introduction

II. Rural Special Education Challenges

A. Personnel Problems

1. recruitment

2. retention

3. summary--recruitment and retention

a. employment factors

(1) ability match

(2) lack of support

(3) experience

(4) burnout

b. personal variables

c. external factors

B. Resources

C. Poverty

D. Dealing with Student Diversity

E. Vocational Placements/Experience

F. Itinerancy of Professionals

III. Life in Rural America

A. Rural Identity

B. Summary

1. attitudes

2. resistance to change

3. changing roles of women

4. anxiety and psychological issues

5. out migration

IV. Potential Solutions to Rural Special Education Challenges

A. Awareness

B. Improve Recruitment and Retention

C. Train Generalists with a Rural Emphasis

D. Better Use of Technology

E. Emphasize Least Restrictive Environment

Part III: Narrative/Lecture Notes

Introduction

When it comes to delivery of services to students with disabilities, all is not entirely well in rural and remote areas of the United States. The farther one moves from centers of population and higher learning, the more difficult become the logistics of program planning and delivery. Special educators in such parts of the country find themselves called to exert a great deal of creativity and flexibility in their professional and personal lives. As a result a chronic shortage of well-trained and competent special educators has been noted.

Several reasons exist for the problems in organization of quality special education services. Among factors cited are recruitment, retention, and professional development of qualified personnel. Professional isolation has been noted among several categories of professionals carrying on practices in remote locations; for example physicians (Boylan & Bandy, 1994. Travel over great distances and the paperwork involved in case management may, in some cases, reduce job satisfaction (Bornfield, Hall, Hall, & Hoover, 1997).

Because a small population base is a defining characteristic of ruralness, teachers must be prepared for encounters with children facing many and varied disabilities. Finally, the same types of demands for multicultural

understanding and sensitivity is required of rural teachers as their urban counterparts. It is probably more difficult to "solve" some special education problems in rural areas due to remoteness and poverty. For example, it is more problematic to arrange vocational experiences for secondary students as required under the transition planning aspects of P.L. 101-476 (Rojewski, 1990). A section of this learning module will be devoted to each problem mentioned above.

Rural settings also bring joy and deep satisfaction to professionals who are psychologically suited to life in America's mountains, prairies, and deserts. For example, lower (though increasing) crime rates have been noted in rural sections of America (Perkins, et al., 1996). The types of informal family networks which make up the social life of rural America, can engender a sense of place and groundedness which is difficult to match in our busy urban centers (Fitchen, 1991). In a second broad section of this module, the sociology of rural life will be explored with an eye toward establishing generalizations with significance for the delivery of educational services.

Challenges in Rural Special Education

In this section, problems with the delivery of special education services in rural areas are explored. Specifically, the following difficulties are engendered by ruralness or remoteness: personnel problems (recruitment, retention, and professional development of qualified staff members), poverty of students and lack of teaching resources, heterogeneity of case loads resulting from the prevalence of few students representing the various special education categories.

Personnel Challenges. Personnel issues which have been shown to affect education in rural areas fall generally under three inter-related

categories, recruitment, retention, and professional development. The very qualities of low population base and remoteness seem to negatively affect the ability of school districts to maintain high quality special education staff (Helge, 1981; 1984).

1. Recruitment.

Recruitment refers to the acquisition of qualified personnel. As employed here, the term refers to the inducement of qualified special education personnel to take positions in rural, remote, and/or reservation areas. The factors which influence candidates' choice of locale for their first (or subsequent) positions are complex (Sturey, 1993). However, it is well known that familiarity, especially inclusive of family ties, is one reason a candidate selects a given geographical location (Bornfield, et al., 1997; Lemke, 1994). Familiarity may have more correlation with retention than with initial hires, however (Story, 1993) . Thus, rural districts, with their small population base, start out at a disadvantage in effecting quality hires.

Rural residents who move to metropolitan environments or even regional service centers to attain higher education often relocate in these or similar areas, particularly for their first positions (Lyson, 1986). A significant minority of such individuals (i.e., those with rural roots) often finish out their careers in rural areas once they've experienced the "big city" (Fitchen, 1991). However, the net effect is a shortage of personnel in all fields which require post-baccalaureate training. In North Dakota, for example, special education directors cite shortfalls in qualified candidates in school psychology, learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, speech-language disorders, occupational therapy, and physical therapy (CSPD, 1995). Very similar patterns are observed across many rural states, Alaska, to name a second specific example (Schnorr,1992; Theobals, 1991).

The net result of recruitment difficulties is that the more difficult it is to attain credentials, the more rural-remote-reservation recruitment is affected. No shortage of elementary and some secondary positions are noted in North Dakota, for example; but, these tend to be positions which are (a) employable at the baccalaureate level, and (b) where a surfeit of qualified candidates are noted nationally (CSPD, 1995).

2. Retention.

In discussion retention reasonably, two terms must be defined. First, retention itself refers to keeping people employed, once hired. Attrition refers to rates of leaving position, generally expressed as a percent and as a function of some personal or employment-based variable. Demographic factors similar to those noted above for recruitment affect retention. In other words, the more difficult it is to recruit new employees, the more difficult it is to retain them once hired. Rural "Leavers" are often quite similar to those who stay, except that they are mobile (Bornfield, Hall, Hall, & Hoover, 1997).

To understand the relationship between recruitment and retention, consider financial resources. On average, rural districts pay less than their more urbanized counterparts. In addition, rural districts are over-represented in rural states where remuneration is also low (Correa & Wordell, 1987). As might be expected, such districts experience relative difficulty recruiting high demand-low availability personnel. Nonetheless, some staff are ultimately recruited. The difficulty for district administrators , at this point, becomes one of retention. Note that all variables associated with recruitment problems remain in place. If the person is skilled and retains a commitment to education and has not developed close ties in the community, they are likely to be lured to positions with more satisfactory compensation and demographics (access to higher education, entertainment and social

opportunities) and economics (higher pay) and thus become an attrition datum (Billingsly, 1993; Bornfield, et al., 1997).

3. Summary: Recruitment and Retention.

Little doubt exists that (1) it is difficult to recruit and retain qualified specialists in rural schools, and (2) that such personnel-based difficulties are associated with problems in the delivery of high-quality services. The nearly double turnover rate of rural special educators (Billingsly, 1993), by itself would make for poorer services. In a recent year (1992) was estimated that 1/2 of the positions in special education and support personnel in North Dakota were filled with less than fully-qualified personnel; North Dakota administrators' experience is not much different than those in other states.

That being noted, what are the factors which mitigate against the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel in rural-remote-reservation areas of the nation? Perhaps the most useful model was proposed by Billingsly (1993). She suggested that three classes of factors affected retention rates of special education and related service professionals, (1) employment, (2) personal, and (3) external.

Employment factors are those directly associated with work in a specific position. Professional qualifications, employment conditions, and commitment are cited as variables associated with this factor. **Personal variables** related to recruitment and retention are those related to an individual's personal life, such as age, years of employment, and cognitive/affective issues. **External factors** consist of those social and policy domains which are not in the direct control of an individual or his/her employer. For example, the political or economic climate of a given state or region would fit in this category.

In the employment area, the following factors are associated with attrition:

a. Ability/Match. Teachers who are seen as more capable or who see themselves that way, and those who believe their personalities and abilities match with the field of education are more likely to leave a district with unfavorable demographics (Bornfield, et al., 1997; Singer, 1993). This phenomenon has also been noted in the migration patterns of members of the general population (Lyson, 1986).

b. Lack of Support. Teachers who believe that they lack support of administrators are more likely to leave positions (Platt & Olson, 1990). Lack of support has been cited as a reason for attrition and as a reason for unhappiness among rural special educators who remain in positions but report low job satisfaction (Bornfield, et al., 1997)

c. Experience. New hires are more likely to leave than teachers who have been on the job for a longer period of time. Family connections or training may interact to strengthen the experience effect.

d. Burnout. Teachers who feel burned out--such as by excessive paperwork--are more likely to leave (Billingsly & Cross, 1991). Many individuals who remain in special education or support positions because they are "tied" to a region by family factors dislike paperwork aspects of special education positions.

Burnout is thought to consist of three interrelated dimensions. The first is emotional exhaustion, the second depersonalization. Depersonalization refers to a tendency to blame work-related problems on one's clientele. The final dimension of burnout is [lack of] a sense of personal accomplishment.

In one study, rural teachers scored slightly more exhausted than a

national sample (Bornfield, et al., 1997) However, these same teachers were less prone to depersonalization and reported a higher than average sense of personal accomplishment. In a log linear prediction model, burnout was not related to attrition.

External factors may impact on recruitment and retention. Luft (1993) found that lower pay and a lack of funds for professional development exacerbated recruitment and retention problems (see also Helge & Marrs, 1982; Stone, 1990). In a study comparing the attitudes and demographics of teachers who remained in special education positions vs. those who left similar positions, Bornfield et al. reported that ratings of the quality of the community as a "place to live", housing satisfaction, and miles traveled to regional centers for entertainment were all external factors which discriminated stayers from leavers.

In terms of personal factors, females are more likely to leave teaching than are males (Billingsly, 1993). If burnout and job satisfaction are seen as personal perceptual variables rather than as purely objective aspects of jobs, they could also be a factor in retention of rural special educators which fall under the personal category.

Resources. Teacher salaries are differentially low in rural districts and in the rural states in which they're over represented. Some have argued that a lack of remuneration has negatively impacted on recruitment and retention of qualified personnel. This, in turn negatively affects the quality of services delivered to students. While sensible, the latter point is not well established in research. For example, no studies exist to our knowledge, which point to differentially lower outcome or satisfaction indices in rural vs. urban programs.

A lack of resources affects more than faculty pay. Access to educational materials and technology has been a complaint of some rural professionals (Holland, 1995). In a resource-poor environment, it may prove more difficult to offer stimulating professional development experiences to teachers, especially considering the high cost of transportation to centers likely to host such conclaves.

Poverty Not all rural residents are, by any measure, living in poverty. However, on average, the more remote a location is demographically, the lower the average income tends to be when a locale is compared with urban and particularly suburban sites (Statistical Abstracts, 1996). Some rural and reservation areas are mired in the deepest poverty of any American counties (Facts on File, 1995).

The incidence of new cases requiring special education services is significantly negatively correlated with socioeconomic status . Degradations in the quality of life associated with poverty are associated with learning difficulties. Mild mental retardation, what used to be termed cultural familial mental retardation, particularly, is associated with poverty (MacMillan, 1982).

The end result of rural poverty is a slightly higher incidence of disabilities in rural areas, particularly in poor counties. This represents another strain on service delivery in these locations. Stern (1992) noted a general increase in the numbers of special education students in rural areas.

Dealing With Student Diversity. In urban centers, enough students with similar disabilities and problems often exist that specialized programs can be developed. This is seldom true in rural-reservation-remote areas (Sowell, Correa, & Wardell, 1987; Mills et al., 1987). The most difficult types of services to establish and maintain appear to be those for low incidence

disabilities such as hearing impairment (Billingsly, 1993; Zuckner, 1994), visual impairment/blindness (Sowell, et al., 1987), severe mental retardation/ multiple disabilities, and autism (Schnorr, 1992).

Vocational Placement and Experiences. A finding from post-21 follow up studies of special education graduates and leavers is that students with disabilities are more employable to the extent that they have experienced paid or volunteer work during their school years. This findings has several implications for delivery of rural special education services.

Many students' with disabilities entree into the world of work is facilitated via informal family networks. A friend or relative may provide a work experience or career opportunity once they discover that the disabled adolescent is in the market for employment (Wehman, 1992). Sociologists have observed that such networks tend to be particularly strong in rural areas (Marrs, 1983). This factor should facilitate job placement.

Several factors operative in rural areas, however, militate against successful secondary and post-secondary vocational programs. First, the great distances involved make to-and-from work transportation a more difficult problem to solve than is true in urban centers. Second, the employment patterns of students with disabilities is most affected by the surrounding economic conditions. The higher unemployment and under-employment factors noted in rural areas will be amplified in the case of disabled persons (Rojewski, 1990). As a general rule, disabled persons' employment rates rise later as local conditions improve and decrease earlier when things go sour (Wehman, 1992). Thus, the raw number of opportunities both for work experiences and long-term employment lag behind in rural-remote-reservation areas. Part of the exodus of the rural

young to metropolitan centers is a function of the same factors which make vocational adjustment more problematic for young adults with disabilities.

Itinerancy of Professionals. Because of the raw distances between centers of populations in rural areas, many professionals hold itinerant status. The physician who maintains office hours in two- to-three rural clinics, the language therapist who serves four schools, and the special education teacher who case manages in three communities are examples of professionals who must drive great distances to deliver services.

Life in Rural America

Identity. In her fine work on upstate New York, Janet M. Fitchen cogently asked, "What, then is rural" (p. 245)? Her response is that ruralness, from an anthropological perspective is related to identity. At least two manifestations of this are observed, both of which are significant for the practice of special education.

First, the community is or was primarily agricultural. Fitchen pointed out that this may be more a sense of identity ("Farming is number one here!") than reality:

> In much of rural New York, farming remains the basis for residents' conceptualization of their ruralness. Even if most residents are not commercial farmers or don't even know a commercial farmer, farming holds a major importance in the physical and social landscapes that surround their lives (Fitchen, 1991, p. 248).

Second, the smallness of places is often manifested sociologically as a sense of groundedness in place, family, church, or other small to medium associations. The sense of isolation that some new special educators evince in rural location may partly be a function of their rather

uncomfortable status as obvious outsiders (Boylan & Bandig, 1994), something which may also be experienced, albeit more rarely, in urban centers.

Demographers, of course, take a quite different approach. Rural areas are those which are not in metropolitan areas of 50,000 population or more or the suburbs of such a place. Here suburbs refers to those areas directly tied economically and socially to a metropolitan area. Fitchen pointed out that confusion is evidenced about what constitutes ruralness because various federal agencies record and report demographic data differently. Often, rural areas are taken as those counties left over, when metropolitan, and town areas are deducted from regional population samples.

Most observers would recognize some of the manifestations of life in the rural United States. Enhanced distances between commercial and leisure-recreational opportunities is one. Rural areas are characterized by low population densities and the existence of open spaces--farmland in production, or fallow, forests and nature preserves, swamp- or wetlands, and deserts or other areas unsuited to or abandoned by farmers.

A Summary of Rural Issues Which Impact on Special Education. As Fitchen argued, low population densities and the existence of open country are not all that make up rural life. A summary is presented below of generalizations about and issues facing rural Americans.

1. Attitudes

Special education teachers moving to rural areas may find a mind set about what constitutes the rural life. The ideology presented here is based on Fitchen's (1991) book and is summarized in Table one below (and Overhead Master). Fitchen noted that many rural residents define their lives by way of

dichotomous contrasts with the 'big city', this despite objective findings that urban vs. rural is, at best, a continuum. Indeed, probably due to the ubiquitous presence of the media (and technological advances), life in urban and rural settings is probably more similar than different. However, from the phenomenological perspective, the perceptions of reality encountered by teachers in rural areas is probably more important than objective "facts".

Table 1. Fitchen's (1991) folk construction of ruralness.
When asked about the nature of ruralness, residents of remote areas contrasted aspects of rural life with "city life" somewhat as follows:

Conceptualizations of Ruralness	vs.	Life in the City
Farming is most important		Commercial and industrial economy
A high quality of life: quiet; slow paced		Noisy and faced paced-- confusing
Sacrifices are necessary; poverty; quality of life is dependent upon the nonmaterial		Life is economically "easy"; quality of life is based on material possessions
personal/ intimate relationships		impersonal

2. Resistance to Change.

An aspect of strong identification with agriculture and changes toward a mixed rural economy is a sense of resistance and entrenchment. Political movements which tap into traditional values and purport to resist the inroads of modernity often achieve a sympathetic ear in rural areas. Teachers attempting to bring new ideas to rural regions may face this conservatism and must understand that part of some individuals' folk definitions of "who they are" are tied to resisting change. Teachers must come equipped with a

sensitivity to this resistance and a sense of respect for local history and customs.

3. Changing Role of Women

One change which has found its way into rural America is the changing role of women. Increasing numbers of women work in small country towns, often to supplement slipping agriculture income (Goodwin, 1991; Sander, 1986). However, like many changes, this one has come later and proceeded more slowly in rural counties than in populous settings. Attitudes about values and change can and do produce conflict and anxiety in some remote locations.

4. Anxiety and Psychological Problems

Despite views of the country live as comparatively anxiety free, modern worries have moved to the farm (Shonkwiler & Moss, 1993; Walker & Walker, 1987). Increased numbers of farmers, farm families, and small town residents suffer anxiety-based stress. Two factors appear to come into play here. First, rapid social change probably plays a role, especially when juxtaposed against the above-stated resistance to change, and (2) financial crises engendered by fluctuating farm prices, such as the noteworthy bust in the mid 1980's. It remains to be seen how the significant change represented by the Freedom to Farm Act will affect the financial status and resultant mental health of rural Americans.

5. Out migration

In states such as North Dakota, population outmigration, often specifically symbolized by the loss of a community's young people, is a severe strain in rural communities. The most rural counties in the United States have lost significant numbers of young people over the past decades

(Population Change in North Dakota, 1991). Consider the following quotation from Fitchen:

> A young woman in the Tug Hill area launching a career in environmental planning remembered, "When I got out of high school, I just knew I'd never come back. Everyone was leaving. None of my friends planned to come back here after college...

As the quotation continued, however, it becomes clear that some young people who do set up in regional metropolitan centers ultimately return to their roots:

> There was nothing to come back to. But now with the way things are booming around here, more of the people I went to school with are coming back...(Fitchen, 1991, p. 93).

As the rural economy diversifies (Albrecht, 1993), the population loss from rural communities may have bottomed out in the mid 1990's. For example, North Dakota was losing population through the 1980's, but this trend seems to have turned around with the latest mid-cycle census (Population Change in North Dakota, 1991).

Potential Solutions to Rural Special Education Service Challenges

In the final section of the narrative, potential solutions to rural special education challenges are discussed. For further information it is recommended that students be directed to the references and resources listed in the reference section to follow.

Awareness. Making potential students aware of both the promises and challenges in rural America may add to their skills and abilities as they head into rural positions. In addition, practice teaching and other rural experiences may exert a salutary affect on recruitment and retention, once students agree to take a rural position. It is important that students be made aware of the

benefits of living in rural counties, such as lower crime rates, a more relaxed pace of life, and close community ties.

Improve Recruitment, Retention, Professional Development. Rural special education administrative personnel must continue to seek out the best employees. Once these individuals are hired, every effort must be made to retain them.. Limiting itinerant status, deflecting paperwork, and housing location assistance are all factors which might influence the best and the brightest to remain in rural America. Professional development opportunities, including defraying expenses for travel and summer school are ways to enhance the retention of the best teachers. It is only through recruiting and retaining the best teachers, that rural special education students will receive the quality of services they deserve.

Train Generalists with a Rural Emphasis. Training programs preparing teachers for rural-remote locations must organize their programs around general practice in education. Teachers must be made aware that, given the distances and population densities involved, they will likely be called on to serve a more heterogeneous population than their urban counterparts. This certainly represents a challenge--but also an opportunity for teachers inclined toward independence and who enjoy a multiplicity of experience.

Make Better Use of Technology. Communication technology, particularly, offers great benefits to rural special educators. Professional development and consultative support from experts, always complaints of rural specialists, will likely be greatly facilitated by audio, visual, and data networks. Note, however, that teachers whose burdens would be lightened by access to technology, must be trained to utilize it to its maximum benefit.

Information technology should probably be a central feature of training programs serving rural states.

Emphasize Least Restrictive Environments. One way that rural special education teachers and related specialists can maximize their impact is via adopting a consultative-based model. That is, rather than delivering services directly to students (for the most part), these individuals would become expert in designing curricular and methodological alternatives to their general education counterparts. In this manner, rural special needs students would be receiving educational services from experts trained in subject matter curriculum areas, but also be getting modifications which fit their unique needs--perhaps the best possible arrangement for many, if not most, rural students with special education needs.

Part IV

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Part V

Overhead Transparency Masters

Outline

I. Introduction

II. Rural Special Education Challenges

III. Life in Rural America

IV. Potential Solutions

Outline: Challenges

A. Personnel Problems

B. Resources

C. Poverty

D. Dealing with Student Diversity

E. Vocational Placements/ Experiences

F. Itinerant Status

Rural Issues

1. Attitudes
2. resistance to change
3. changing role(s) of women
4. anxiety and psychological issues
5. out migration

Solutions to Rural Challenges

A. Awareness

B. Improved Recruitment and Retention

C. Train Generalists with a Rural Emphasis

D. Better Use of Technology

E. Emphasize Least Restrictive Environment

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment

Recruitment refers to the acquisition of qualified personnel (i.e., it refers to "new hires).

Retention

Retention refers to keeping staff members employed, once hired

Factors

- employment factors
- personal factors
- external factors

Rural Identity

...farming remains the basis for residents' conceptualization of their ruralness. Even if most residents are are not commercial farmers...farming holds a major importance in the physical and social landscapes that surround their lives (Fitchen, 1991, p. 248).

Folk Construction of Ruralness

Conceptualization of Ruralness	vs	Life in the City
Farming central to identity		Commercial and industrial
High life quality, slow paced		Noisy and faced pace
Sacrifices are necessary; poverty; quality of life dependent upon the nonmaterial		Life is easy; quality based on material possessions
Personal-intimate relationships		impersonal